

# JOIN THE EXCLUSIVE NETWORK OF FAMILY BUSINESSES.



## **How Your Family Business Can Benefit From Telling Your History**

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Does this sound like you?

“Family owned and operated since 1920.”

“John Smith & Sons, since 1950.”

“The Jones Company, now in its third generation of family ownership.”

We see these taglines in ads, signs, and other marketing materials all the time. As a historian, I get excited, go to the business’s website, and want to read the history. Invariably, there’s nothing there! As a PR and marketing professional, I ask myself: Why the heck not?

In marketing, we are all searching for ways to differentiate ourselves from other businesses. What makes us unique? How can we make an “emotional connection” with our customers? How can we deepen their loyalty?

Telling the story of your family business can accomplish all three. No one else can tell YOUR story! And the fact is, people love a warm and fuzzy family story. No one is interested in the occasional family conflict (insert laugh track here). Instead, people want to hear stories about multiple generations working together and passing down knowledge from one generation to the next. They want to hear proud father/son stories, or mother/daughter stories, or husband/wife stories. Why? Because it’s what we all want in our own lives.

Often, telling your story means doing some serious family and community research. Families don’t always know the complete history of the business’s founding. They don’t always know

their own genealogy. No business is an island, and no family is an island. As a historian, when I dig into this kind of project, I ask questions like:

- What is the founder's cultural background?
- Why did he/she locate the business where he/she did?
- What need did the business fill at its founding, and how has that need changed over time (or not)?
- How does the business fit into its industry historically and today?
- Where are there ties to the community (for example, has the business been active in the chamber of commerce, as a corporate citizen, or in response to an urgent community need)?
- What does the business mean to the community?
- Are there interesting family stories that impacted the business (one client of mine's grandmother ran the family insurance company during the Great Depression – a woman!)?
- How did local and national events impact the business (military service, for example)?

The list of questions goes on, but you can see that what I suggest goes far beyond simply stating, "Family owned and operated since 1920."

This research will involve looking at company records, family records, those of your local historical society and public library, and other repositories of information that would house material. For example, in the Boston area, the Baker Library at the Harvard Business School owns centuries' worth of business records. You might have industry-specific places to look (insurance, banking, legal), or the files of the college attended by your founder or the organizations he/she participated in (nonprofit boards, community groups).

Along the way, you will keep a lookout for images to start building a visual as well as a textual story. We all know how much people are visual today! Also think about video and audio. Video, especially, is expected today as much as a website or business card.

Then the question becomes: What do you DO with all of this information?

I look forward to answering that question during our webinar on Tuesday, August 21!

Let's dig into this together, because my goal (using examples) is to inspire you to investigate and tell your story in ways that will build your business.

See you soon!

